



Bezango, WA 985 # 6 * Copyright © 2002, Steve Willis *
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Tucked away in the far northwest corner of the USA is the State of Washington. And hidden in the Coastal Range, north of the Columbia, south of the Olympics, west of I-5, and east of the Pacific Ocean, is an obscure town you won't find on any road map. Bezango. As we continue to zoom in, we'll see the town is divided into distinct neighborhoods. One area of Bezango, covering a couple blocks, is called "Poetville."

Poetville earned that label due to the coincidence, and that is what it is-- a coincidence, of many residents within this neighborhood having been named after famous poets. Although most who live within Poetville are not actually involved with poetry, many of them do have a hand in some form of art and culture.

Hilda Doolittle "Sniffy" Dragon, who will let you know within 90 seconds of introduction that she is the wife of Doc Dragon, has given herself the title of "The Maven of Poetville." She writes an arts column for *The Bezango Stimulator*, our local newspaper. Like most critics, Sniffy lacks any creative ability in any art form, including the art of critical review.

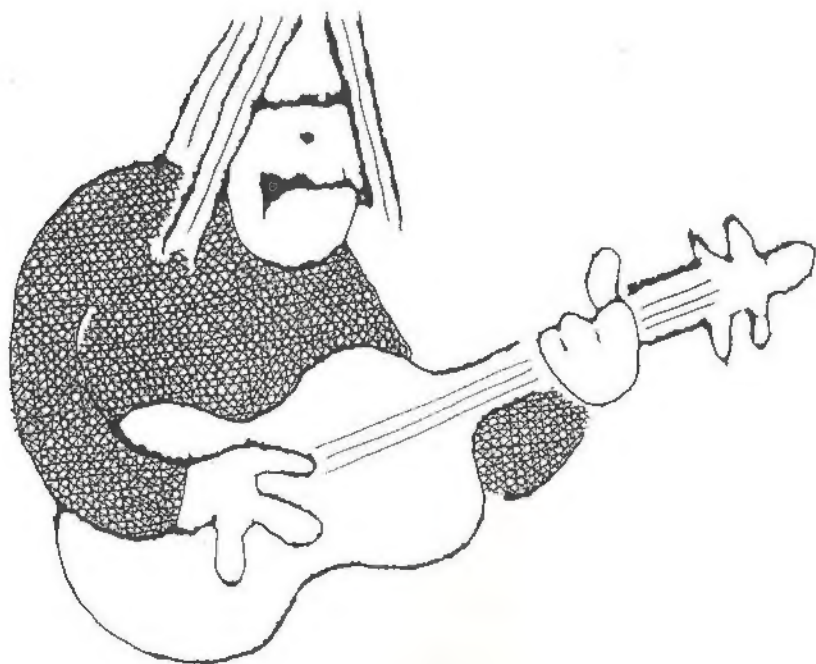


People enjoy reading her column because she never has anything nice to say about anybody, and abuse is always a big draw. Her popularity among readers, and believe it or not the artists themselves, probably isn't what she intended. For example, she somehow manages to work in the word "Detestable" in every, and I mean every review. In a recent art showing held in a temporarily vacant retail spot at the strip mall (where Socks 4 U used to be), all the artists who had previously been covered by Sniffy made sure to quote her reviews in the preshow publicity. Especially the lines where she used the word "Detestable."

John Milton "One-Note Johnny" Nixon has the distinction of being one of those "detestable" musicians reviewed by the Maven of Poetville. Actually, in this case she might have a point. He shows up at "Open Mike Nite" every Thursday at the Head Loader. "One-Note Johnny" earned his nickname honestly-- he can play only one note, with a teeth jarring **BLANG!** Last week he gave us this cheerful song:

"Duh-pressionnnnn." (Pause) **BLANG!** "Ree-jectionnnnn." (Pause) **BLANG!** "Frrrus-trationnnnn." (Pause) **BLANG!** "Dee-jectionnnnn." (Pause) **BLANG!** "Aaaalien-ationnnnn." (Pause) **BLANG!**

And so on ... for an hour. As Jack Gorch the bartender says, other taverns have a "Happy Hour," but the Head Loader is the only one with a "Despair Hour."



One-Note Johnny's girlfriend is Sylvia Plath Googybugg, who is really into the music of the Moody Blues. If you pay her a visit you'll discover she has their music playing on one continuous tape loop. Whenever the tape hits the line where the Moody Blues say, "Senior citizens wish they were young," Sylvia makes all visitors be very still and quiet while she shuts her eyes and lapses into sort of a mini-rapture.

"Senior citizens wish they were young"?! I mean, c'mon, she has to be putting us on, right? Well let me warn you, don't make the mistake of poking fun at this lyric in front of Sylvia. And if you make Sylvia mad you'll further depress One-Note Johnny. And we all know what that means.

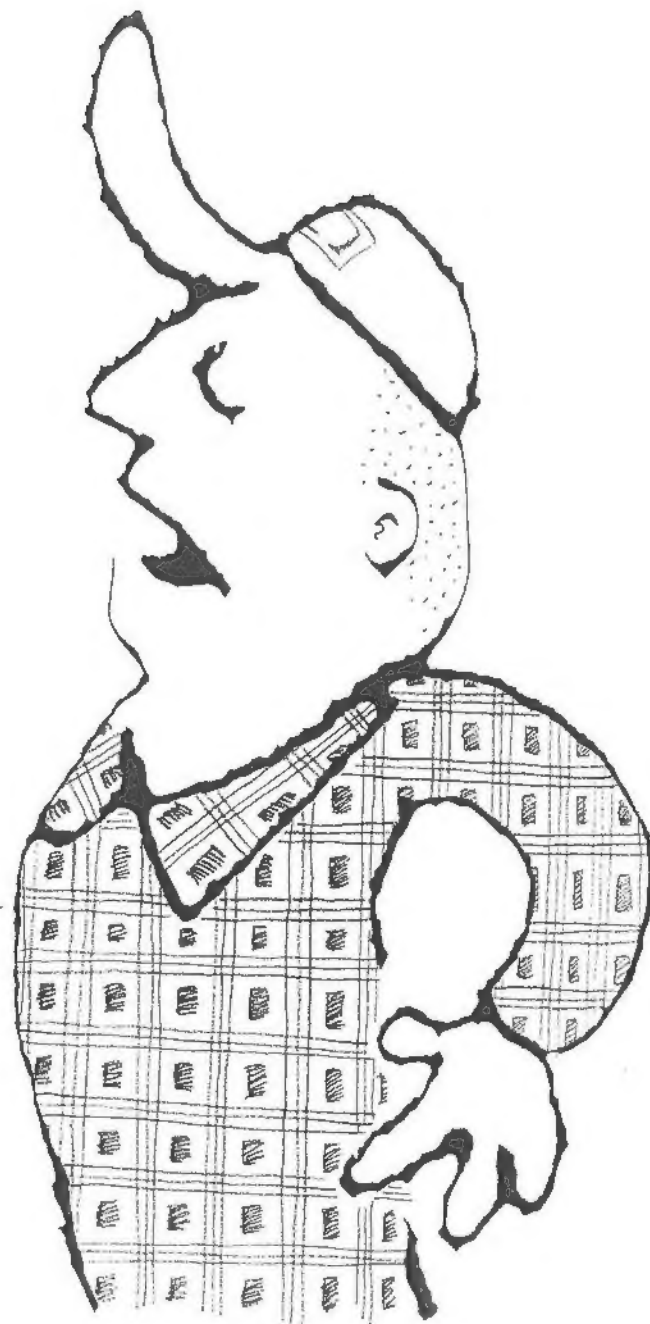
When it comes to music, the high point of the year in town is during the Pancake Lunch at the New Pedestrian Church. This is held annually, always following the Mountain Beaver Festival Parade. In between grace and lunch, the diners sing the Bezango Anthem. A misty-eyed moment for us all.

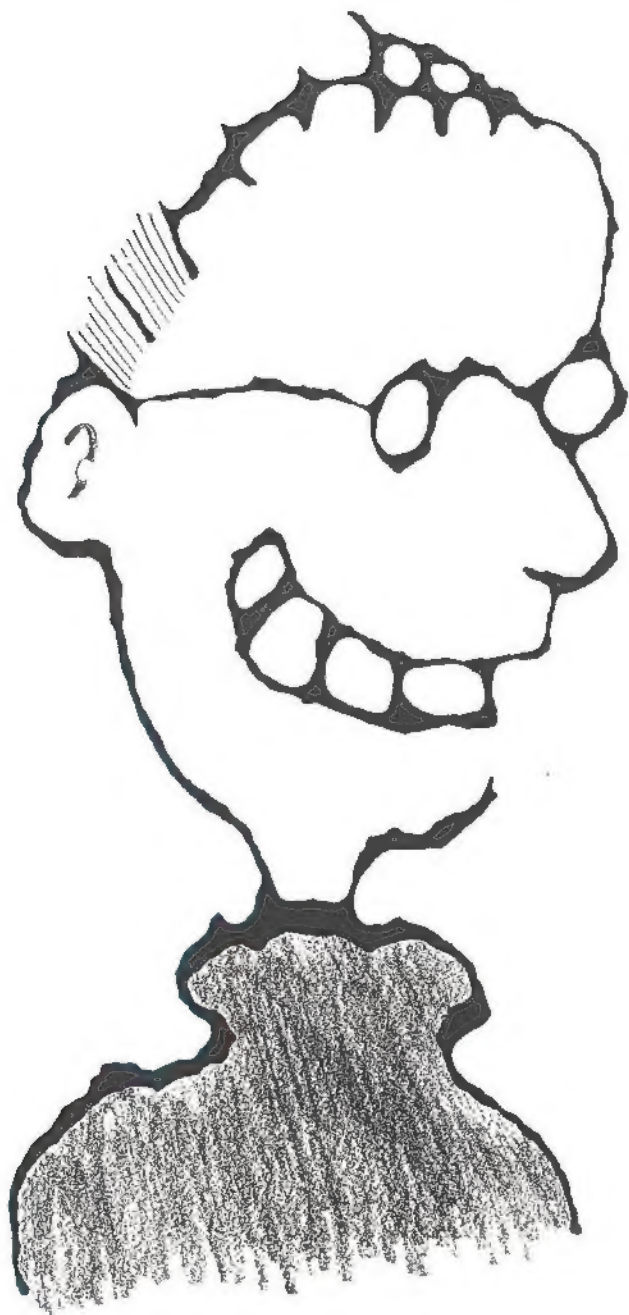
But that aside, the next most impressive musical event took place in the mid-1980s. It was during this time that the Washington Public Power Supply System (Known as WPPSS, or WHOOPS, I'm not kidding) was building several nuclear power plants. But it was an economic meltdown, the worst public default in U.S. history. Projects on both sides of the state were simply stopped in mid-construction. The two towers near Satsop, which were never online, are still up-- monuments to the two-party system-- the Greedy and Gullible. Well, in all the confusion the world apparently forgot that they did finish a nuclear power plant next to Bezango. I'll tell you all about it in the near future. Back to the music and another Poetville guy.

In the mid-1980s the town was basically taken over by drunk nuclear power plant construction workers from Oregon. It was awful. One night in the Head Loader they started a boozy rendition of the very militaristic Oregon State Song, "Land of the empire builders, land of the golden west, conquered and held ..."

Gary Snyder Thiessen had had enough. It was bad enough these Oregon clowns didn't know how to pump their own gas, now we get this garbage. So he stood up and sang "Washington, My Home," an upbeat celebration of democracy, unlike Oregon's fascist tune. In no time the other Bezango natives joined him. It was stirring. It was wonderful.

It was Bezango at its best. Not unlike the time Victor Lazlo led the customers of Rick's in "La Marseilles" to drown out the Germans singing "Die Wacht am Rhein."





A Poetville resident runs the only movie house in Bezango. T.S. Eliot Bricker is the manager of the Cinema Pretentieux. After T.S. graduated from Homer T. Bone High School, he left Bezango and attended film school. But instead of moving to a large urban area to follow a career, T.S. came back home with a mission.

You will never see a commercial mainstream major motion picture in his movie house. Most of the movies he shows have subtitles, or if it is in English it is directed by Andy Warhol or someone like that. T.S. is particularly fond of Russian Expressionists, also Alain Robbe-Grillet films.

The shows have the same routine, T.S. introduces each movie with an hour long lecture. After the movie is over, a discussion follows, usually lasting as long, if not longer, than the feature itself. T.S. locks the doors to make sure no one misses out on the education, "It's for their own good," he'll say. Last year he showed all 26 hours of "Die Zweite Heimat" (1992) without a break.

Although his house is never packed, he does draw enough people to stay in business. After all, it is the only movie theater in Bezango. I recently heard he is thinking of drumming up a bigger audience by giving the place a new name: "The Detestable Theatre."

Even though Ezra Pound Sneedmoss made his living as a funeral director, he was more famous for his parlor trick (no pun intended, honest!) at parties. He could reshape his face as if it was clay. If he hadn't felt obligated to keep the family business going, he might have become famous as an entertainer.

One fateful night at a Chamber of Commerce party he molded his visage into an especially goofy mask at the request of his fellow businessmen and a terrible thing happened. His face got stuck and he couldn't change it back. This happened about the same time the Bezango WPPSS nuke plant went online, and in hindsight I think there is a probable connection.

Anyway, with a mug frozen in such an expression, continuing his career as a funeral director was impossible. So he moved to Seattle and started a new life as a very successful mediator for law enforcement. He's the guy they send in during hostage negotiations or to talk down suicidal people from bridges. Ezra saves lives every month.





Bezango has a long annual tradition in the world of the performing arts. When the students of Homer T. Bone High School present "A Midsummer Night's Dream" most of the town comes to enjoy the play. We know from old issues of *The Bezango Stimulator* this has been going on for at least a century.

Every year, before the curtain opens, Robert Service "Elf Boy" Flemm walks out on stage in an elf costume and puts a horn to his lips. Then someone off stage puts on an old record with the kind of music one would hear when royalty enters. The record is so old and familiar we know every pop and skip as we listen to that needle travel down the well known groove. If there is a new scratch since last year we'll take note.

Robert wasn't always Elf Boy. In the old days the original Elf Boy was made out of plywood. It was wheeled out on stage, the record was played, the curtain would rise, and Shakespeare's most delightful play would follow. But something happened to the plywood Elf Boy in 1963. It was the victim of a heist. The disappearance of the original Elf Boy has become a famous local unsolved mystery.

Anyway, Robert, who was in high school at the time, stepped in as the substitute Elf Boy in 1963. Since that day he has never worn any other clothes than his Elf Boy costume and will not respond to "Robert." Call him by that name and he'll say, "Sorry, my name is Elf Boy." This case study only confirms a theory I have long held about people named "Robert" (or "Bob" as some of them prefer to be called), but I'll save that for later.

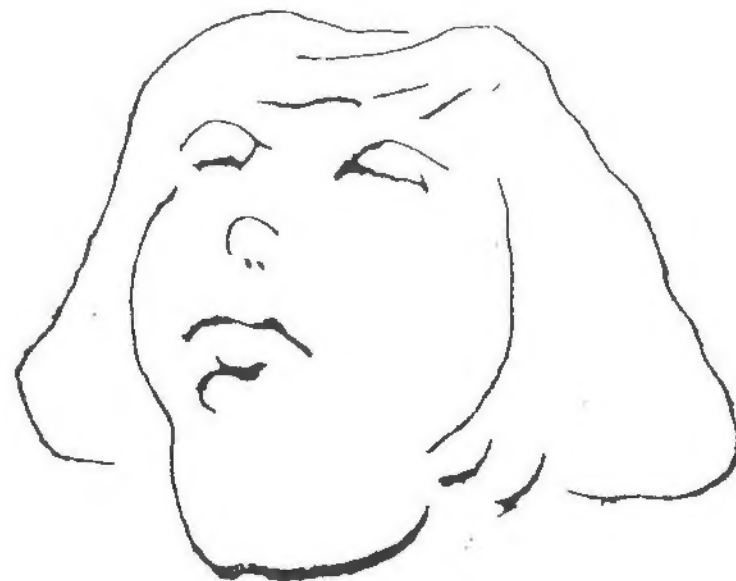


Here's a peculiar Pacific Northwest art form: a huge log, maybe 15-20 feet long, is upended and becomes a pedestal for a rusted out bulldozer. There's one on Hood Canal, another in Oakville, go see them if you don't believe me.

But in Bezango we have a bulldozer forest. Robert Frost McGee has erected over 100 of these things on a clearcut within view of town.

He prefers to be called "Bob." I think you get the picture.

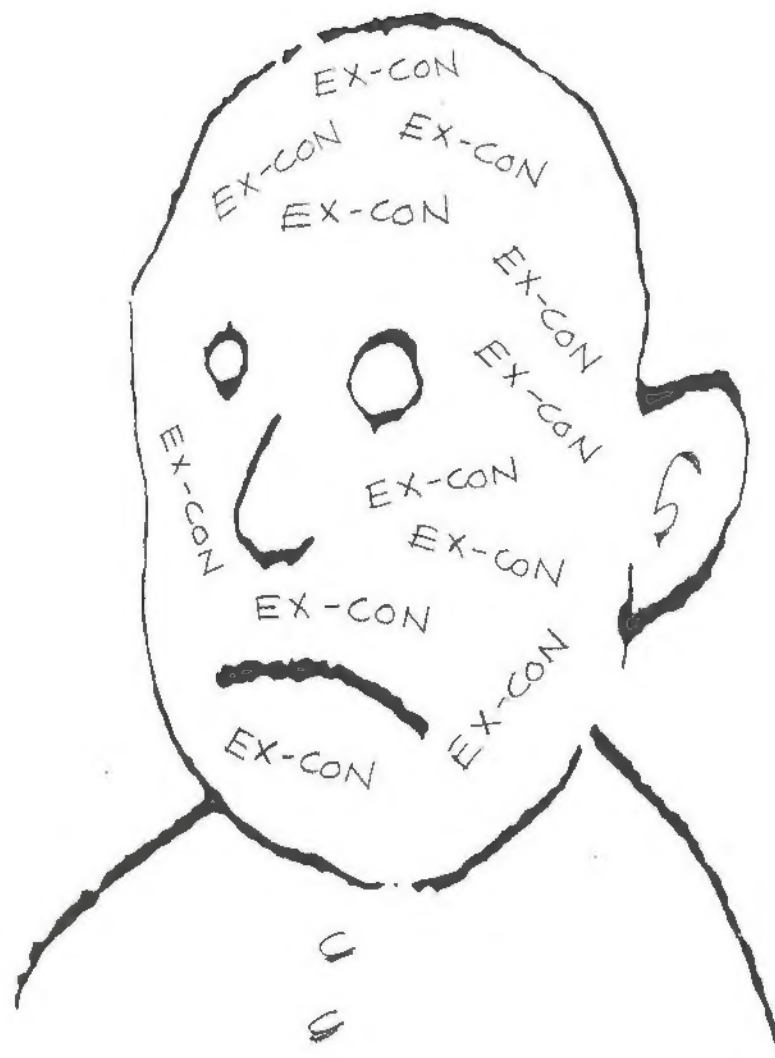
Most people, herself included, do not consider Elizabeth Barrett Browning "Snuffy" Dragon to be an artist at all. She took out a classified ad in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* that read: "I didn't ask to be born. Send me money." It worked. Amazing. Probably one of the more financially rewarding examples of conceptual art I can think of.

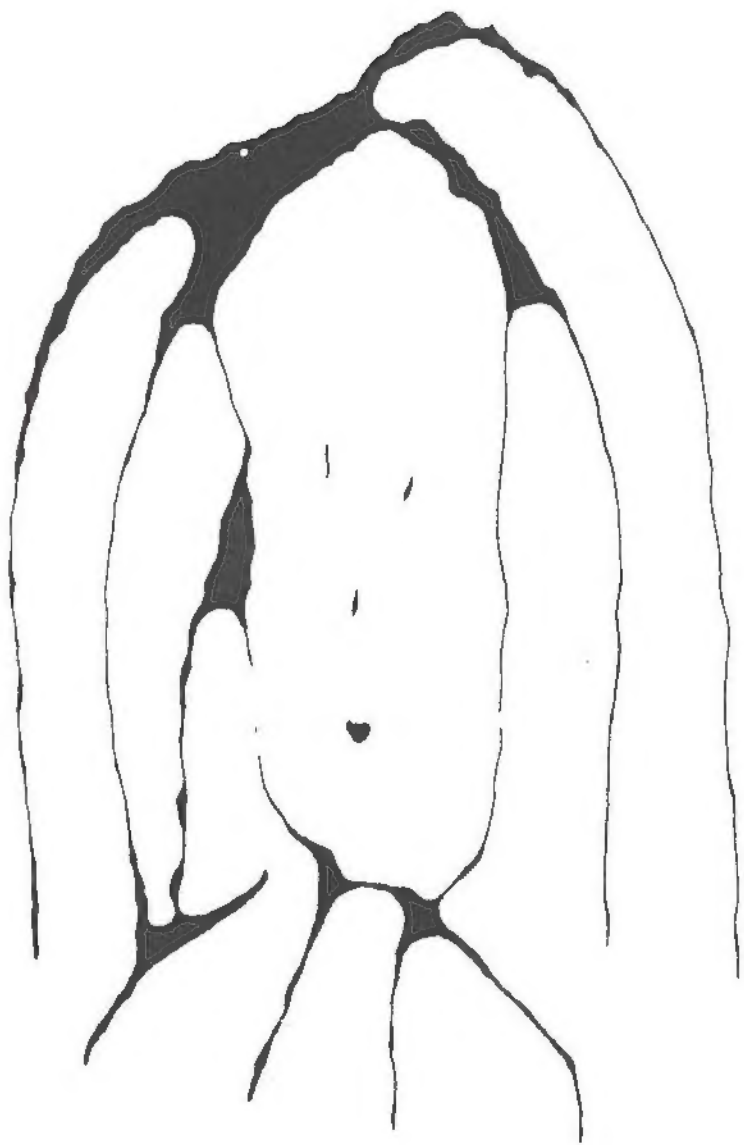


As isolated as we are, Bezango is still not immune from the fads of the outside world-- including body art.

Robert Lowell Snacklebee, known as "Bob" (Yes, I said "Bob." Those three letters, B-O-B, really say it all, don't they?), went to Aberdeen/Hoquiam a few years ago and got really plastered. When he woke up the next day he discovered he had made an unfortunate choice in tattoo art.

Even though "Bob" has never spent a minute of his life in jail, he is a branded man. No one trusts him. "He has 'Ex-Con' written all over his face," people say.





Emily Dickinson Moop describes herself as a "smaller than life" figure. In terms of the way she presents herself to the world at large, this could be true, but in fact she is one of the most influential artists in Bezango. She never signs her art and few people connect her with the product of her work.

By influential I mean not only is her work widely seen and talked about, but she is considered dangerous and inspires a sense of fear into the hearts of Bezango's elite. Here is what she does: Under the cover of darkness, Emily likes to alter billboards and other advertisements, usually undoing all the big bucks poured into some public relations campaign with a few simple swabs of paint.

For example, in a big recruiting billboard for the U.S. Army that read, "Join the Army and Learn a New Skill," she changed it with a little paint so it read, "Join the Army and Learn How to Kill." When Mayor Jerry Thiessen ran for re-election in the last round, he had big signs that said, "Jerry Cares ..." One morning Bezango woke up and found each sign had the added words, "... About Jerry."

When *The Bezango Stimulator* went through a big ad campaign to drum up subscriptions, they had a new billboard every month to promote different sections of the paper. When the sign went up pitching, "It's the Arts... with Hilda Doolittle Dragon, only in *The Bezango Stimulator!*" it wasn't long before the word "Detestable!" appeared in big neat letters across the top.

The only real poet in Poetville is Bob Peabody, one of the few residents of that neighborhood with a nonpoet name. He has written hundreds of poems extolling the rustic virtues of outhouses. And ladies, he's available.

